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SUBJECT: JERUSALEM MEDIA REACTION (12/28): The PA continues to condemn the killing of three Palestinians by Israeli forces in Nablus

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Main Stories:  
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The three dailies lead with stories on the activities in the West Bank and Gaza to commemorate the first anniversary of the Gaza war. President Abbas reiterated that the PA will pursue "war criminals and bring them to justice" and called on the Palestinian factions to end the state of division and achieve national unity.

The local press continues to report on the Palestinian Authority (PA) condemnation of the Israeli attack against Palestinians in Nablus on Saturday. PA Presidency Secretary General Tayyeb Abdel Rahim gave condolences to the families of the Palestinians who were killed on behalf of PA President Mahmoud Abbas. Independent daily Al-Ayyam front pages news on Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu congratulating his army for the operation in Nablus during the ministerial cabinet meeting yesterday. Citing an Israeli source, Al-Ayyam and PA official daily Al-Hayat Al-Jadida report that Washington is asking for more information from the Israeli government regarding the incident.

The local press publishes contradictory reports regarding the prisoner exchange deal. While independent daily Al-Quds quotes Prime Minister Netanyahu saying that an agreement is still a long way off, Al-Ayyam reports on Hamas and Egypt saying that 90% of the disagreements over the deal have been resolved and that it is almost complete. Israeli Radio reported on Egyptian Foreign Ministry Spokesman Husam Zaki saying yesterday that Hamas agreed to the expulsion of some of the released prisoners.

Citing Israeli TV Channel 10, the dailies report that the Israeli Housing Ministry issued new construction tenders yesterday to build

692 housing units in Jerusalem settlements.

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Weekend Stories:  
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Sunday, December 27:

The three dailies lead with stories on Israeli forces killing six Palestinians in the West Bank and Gaza Saturday. The Israeli forces killed three Fatah activists who were suspected of killing a settler on Thursday. The men were unarmed and killed in front of their families in their homes in Nablus, according to reports. A family member of one of the targets was also killed by a fire that ignited after shots were fired. The three Palestinians killed in Gaza were workers collecting trash near the border fence. Nabil Abu Rudeineh, Spokesperson for the PA Office of the President said in a press release, "The Israeli escalation in the West Bank and Gaza Strip and Israel's return to the policies of assassinations and random killings under lame excuses reveals that the occupation's government has decided to destroy the security and stability of the Palestinian people. Israel wants to drag our people into a cycle of violence to avoid political pressures and obligations." Prime Minister Salam Fayyad condemned the operation, calling it a grave escalation that must be seen in the context of attempts to undermine the state of security and stability that the PA was able to achieve. Prime Minister Fayyad called for avoiding being dragged into a cycle of violence and chaos.

Al-Quds and Al-Hayat Al-Jadida run front page stories on

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confrontations that broke out Saturday morning in the East Jerusalem neighbourhood of Sheikh Jarrah when settlers attacked the residents. Eye-witnesses said that scores of settlers threw stones at the families and beat a French solidarity activist on the head with sticks, causing serious injuries. Three members of one family were also injured by the settlers. Resident Amal Al Qassem said that the Israeli police allowed the settlers to escape instead of arresting them. Al Qassem added "All the settlers' attacks are carried out under the protection of the Israeli police forces. Anyone from the neighbourhood who complains is taken away and interrogated by the police."

Al-Ayyam runs a front page story quoting well-informed sources saying that contrary to reports, Hamas leader Dr. Mahmoud Az Zahhar did not leave Gaza until Saturday, which some say signifies Hamas' dissatisfaction with Israel's most recent proposal regarding the prisoners' exchange deal. According to the sources, the recent Israeli proposal included an approval to release 438 prisoners from the list of 450 prisoners put forward by Hamas. The Israeli government continues to have reservations about the release of 12 prisoners, including leaders from Fatah, Hamas and the Palestinian Front for the Liberation of Palestine.

Al-Ayyam and Al-Hayat Al-Jadida front page news on Arab League Secretary General Amr Moussa saying, in the first clear and public criticism of Hamas since the 2007 coup, that Hamas must sign the reconciliation agreement without any further delay since Fatah has already signed it. While calling for accelerating the reconciliation process and refraining from providing any excuses to delay it, Moussa said "The Palestinian division has served a severe blow to the Palestinian cause and we don't want the blow to be fatal." Hamas spokesperson Sami Abu Zuhri accused Moussa of "shunning his responsibilities by making such statements," reiterating that Hamas will not give in to any pressures or blackmailing attempts to change its position.

Saturday, December 26:

The three dailies lead with stories quoting Izzat Risheq, a member of the Hamas political bureau, confirming that Hamas will deliberate the Israeli response regarding the prisoners' exchange deal in a two-day meeting in Damascus before delivering its final response through the German mediator. Khaled Abdel Majeed, the secretary general of the coalition of Palestinian factions in Damascus stated

that the disagreement revolves around Israel's refusal to release nine leaders who are serving long sentences and the Israeli government's insistence to expel 123 prisoners, including 90 to the Gaza Strip, 20 to Qatar, and 13 to other countries.

The three dailies also run front page stories on hundreds of Palestinian, Israeli, and foreign solidarity activists participating in a demonstration against settlement activities in Jerusalem. Israeli police arrested eight Palestinians and peace activists while soldiers and police forces attacked the protestors with clubs.

Al-Quds runs a front page story on Fatah Central Committee member Azzam Al Ahmad saying that Fatah will not accept any attempt to amend the national reconciliation document that was signed by Fatah. Al Ahmad called on Hamas to sign the document as is and stressed that they will not withdraw from the national dialogue unless Egypt declares a new position in this regard. Al Ahmad added that Fatah signed the paper, despite having comments and reservations and

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despite the tremendous pressure exerted by the US and some Arab countries against signing it.

Al-Ayyam and Al-Hayat Al-Jadida carry front page stories on Hamas criticizing Egypt's placement of underground metal barriers along the Egyptian-Gaza border to prevent smuggling into Gaza through the tunnels. During a rally held in Gaza, Hamas leader Hamad Raqab told protestors "we expected the Egyptian army to support us, but unfortunately, the steel moved towards Gaza to strangulate it, to break it. But Gaza will not be broken." Meanwhile, Egyptian Minister of Foreign Affairs Aboul Gheit denied media reports that Egypt will stop the construction. Gheit said in a press release that "Egypt is not ready to stop protecting its people and borders."

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Al-Quds runs an editorial under the title "Without Conscious" that criticizes the international community for not showing any sympathy towards the crisis that resulted in Gaza after the war. The editorial blames the Europeans and Americans for not doing anything to punish Israel for its crimes against the people in Gaza while at the same time promoting human rights and justice. The writer concludes that the Western countries have to bear the responsibility for the continued suffering of the people of Gaza.

RUBINSTEIN